ART AND LETTERS SERIES: ONE

SEALS & STATUETTES OF KULLI, ZHOB MOHENJO DARO AND HARAPPA

J. P. Guha

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By the same author
INTRODUCING INDAIN ART

Seals and Statuettes of Kulli, Zhob, Mohenjo Daro, and Harappa

J. P. GUHA

Associated Publishing House
(Incorporating Vir Publishing House)
New Delhi-5

VIR PUBLISHING HOUSE
7717, New Market, Karol Bagh
New Delhi-5

First Published 1967

PRINTED IN INDIA
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY RAVINDER KUMAR PAUL
FOR VIR PUBLISHING HOUSE, NEW DELHI-5

To

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

whose taste is never a half taste

NOTE

Three of the essays collected in this monograph appeared in *Thought*, and I tender my thanks to the editor who gave my opinions their first publicity. For the drawings of seals and statuettes I am indebted to a very young artist. His name is Amaleswar Sen.

Hans Raj College, J. P. G.
Delhi-7.

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A LIST OF THE FIGURES

SEALS AND STATUETTES OF KULLI, ZHOB, MOHENJO DARO, AND HARAPPA

INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of the following notes is to analyse some of the well-known art objects found on the sites mentioned in the title of this article, partly as an attempt to appreciate their artistic merit, but more with a view to showing why the views held about them by critics are often misleading and sometimes wrong. These views gained acceptance on the publication of the works of Sir John Marshall, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Stuart Piggott, and a few Indian writers, among whom one immediately recalls the name of Rakhaldas Bannerjee. But before proceeding to discuss why these views do not take us very far in appreciating the art objects under discussion, it may be as well to state briefly the method I have employed here. In the first place, my method does not permit me to furnish new facts, and by furnishing them knock out the very basis of the theory I wish to controvert. My appraisal does not include 'research', and this paper is not a thesis. And secondly, I do not intend to pronounce any judgment—I mean a judgment which is not controlled by the critic's attention to the concrete—assuming my judgment to be more foolproof and less vulnerable than the judgments of others. On the contrary, I have confined myself to such practical conclusions as can be drawn by working in terms of particular analysis, that is, analysis of individual art objects, which alone should give rise to judgments. It is only by keeping as close as possible to the objects of art that I have defined and illustrated my point of view, and in this way I have tried to guard against the errors which I find in the views I have inherited from my predecessors.

(ii) KULLI AND ZHOB

I propose, then, to begin by examining the art of Kulli and Zhob. Obviously, if we want to study the starting-point of the sculptural tradition of India, we must go further back than Harappa Culture and turn to the terracotta figurines unearthed not very long ago in Western India (now in Pakistan) on sites in Baluchistan, the Makran, and Sind, where the earliest known peasant communities in India have been identified. In common with the early cultures of the Middle East the peasant cultures of Western India find themselves classified into two groups on the basis of the colour employed in pottery-painting. Thus it has been observed that buff-ware prevailed in the South Baluchistan and red-ware in the north. Each of these type sites again is divided into further subgroups, named after the site where the culture is most prominent. Among these cultures, the most interesting from the point of view of sculpture are the Kulli Culture in South Baluchistan and the Zhob Culture in the Zhob Valley of North Baluchistan. Both these culture complexes have yielded a fair number of terracotta figurines, and in them we may see the beginnings of plastic art in India.

Difference of burial rites, a distinctive style of painted pottery, and an abundance of clay figurines (about 151) mark off the Kulli Culture from the rest of the peasant communities of Western India. The clay figurines Kulli of include women and animals. Among the animals the bull alone came in for plastic expression, although to the Kulli artists birds, fishes, black bucks, or ibexes, and cats were not unknown. The bulls are painted white and sketchily modelled, but the figurines of women, made in pinkish buff colour (or white) clay, are more elaborate and complex than the bulls. Though small in size, each three to four inches in length, these representations are stamped with a forceful vitality

ordered and defined by the magic of art.

BOS INDICUS

But the forceful vitality is not conceived organically, especially in the bull. The animal is represented abstractedly and the vitality is expressed symbolically. For a proper appreciation of the point we must compare the terracotta bulls with the animals painted on Kulli pots. In both realistic details have been reduced to a minimum. Thus the large circular eyes, the elongated body, stumpy legs, and the exaggerated hump seen on Kulli pots are also repeated in the clay figures. But in both the distortion has been practised within limits. The bull need not be mistaken for a horse, and one may agree with Professor Piggott that 'the characteristic features of the bull are well enough suggested'.[1] Nevertheless, it is obvious that the maker of the Kulli bull was not interested in a realistic representation. Symbolic significance rather than correctness of representation is evident from the vertical stripes and transverse strokes splashed on the torso, shoulders, base of the horns, and forelegs of the cattle.

That of all animals the humped bull, *Bos indicus*, should be the object of particular attention to the Kulli modellers is striking. The bull has a long history in Indian art. It is found on the seals of Harappa, though it does not figure among the animals surrounding the so-called Proto-Siva; in the Maurya period the animal is seen poised beautifully on the Asokan column from Rampurva; later, from Gupta times onwards it is copiously represented as the mount of Siva in most Saivite temples. With the Kulli people the bull must have been an object of piety, and it is not unlikely that they were the pioneers of bull-worship in India. There is no evidence, and little probability, that the cult originated in Vedic India,[2] and that the cattle were brought by the

Aryans into India from the Middle East. Can we say that the cult came from the Middle East? It may be argued that the cylinder-seal from Ur, the steatite cup found at Tell Agrab in the Diyala region, the scarlet-ware pot from Sumer, cited by Professor Piggott,[3] all depict bulls, the last a scene of bull-worship and, therefore, on the basis of these data we may conclude that the people of Kulli took the idea of bull-worship from the Middle East. But these bulls are typically Indian in appearance though carved and painted by Sumerian hands. The presence of the Indian bull in Western Asia, therefore, does not tell us anything about who borrowed the cult from whom, but it does tell us that the Baluchi traffickers often came down to chaffer with the merchants of Elam or Sumer, in that age the great entrepot of the Ancient East, and passed on to them, among other things, their art and the technique of its representations. The humped bull was as much an Aryan heirloom as it was of the 'dark-skinned and flat nosed' Kulli folks.[4]

MOTHER GODDESS

The female figurines of the Kulli Culture are of just as great interest. These figures may more properly be called types rather than portraits, for none of these images emphasizes a dominant trait; the 'nymphs' are all much of a muchness. With their narrow foreheads, circular eyes, aquiline nose, with no indication of lips and hardly any chin, the female figurines are at the farthest remove from *mimesis*. This together with the discovery of a stone phallus at Moghul Ghundai and a female figurine with the pronounced accent on vulva and thighs at Periano Ghundai lends credence to the suggestion that these plastics are the earliest representations of Mother Goddesses.

If, therefore, the young women are representations of Mother Goddesses, as indeed they seem to be, it is necessary that we should understand the specific vision they symbolize. It will be observed that in a primitive agricultural society gods and goddesses are frequently associated with the fertility of men, animals, and the Earth. The primitive mind, looking for bounty in Nature betrays a particular delight in investing deities with symbols of profusion and plenty. Are we, therefore, to postulate that a fertility deity of this type was revered and sought after by the Kulli peasants?

Among the many representations that have come to be identified as fertility goddesses two types are clearly discernible. First, as in earlier Aurignacian specimens, fertility goddesses have been shown with an exaggerated portrayal of breasts, posterior, and the genitals. The second type, in contrast, seems almost incorporeal. The artist deliberately attenuates those parts of the body which are accented in the first type. Corporeality is replaced by ornamental decoration and the solid flesh is idealized. Paradoxical as it may appear, both types—sensuous and abstract—are frank expressions of the love of life.

KULLI GODDESS

The Kulli goddess hardly represents either type. To begin with, these figures have tiny breasts. Again their busts are elaborately decorated with ornaments and coiffure. As for the characteristic emphasis on the posterior and genital zones, it may be pointed out that so far no figure has been discovered which does not end below the waist. The Kulli goddess is, therefore, not sensuous like the first type. Nor is she supersensuous like the second.

It will be observed that the lower part of these figures

is flat, the bottom in each case merges with earth (Figure 1).[5] A goddess shaped in this way could only be symbolic of the Earth in which case these figurines must be identified with the Earth Mother. Now these figurines of the Mother Earth are by no means exclusively concerned with the sowing of seeds and the reaping of harvests. They concern equally all that pertains to the Earth—men, animals, and harvests, their creation as well as their destruction. The female deity is as much the mother of plant life as of the animal. An example of the latter is afforded by the single figure of a woman holding two infants. It is further to be observed that these images contain hardly any trace of philosophic introspection or any spirit of devotion, and what we see in them is an immediate expression of the great innocence of the unconscious in which by a kind of *participation mystique* heterogenous elements of Nature seem to have been yoked in the same image. The concept of the Mother Earth or *Magna Mater* as the supreme feminine divinity in whom all the diversities of Nature coalesce and from whom issue all things, both mental and physical, belongs to a much later phase of speculation.

But the Kulli artist dimly descried the vision of the Mother Earth, handicapped as he was by his technique. Neither the *applique* method nor the thin modelling which was all he knew could bring to a precise definition the sensibilities he had in mind. Nevertheless, the result is not altogether disappointing. The strength of the Mother Goddess is amply displayed by her broad shoulders and prominent chest, while the narrow forehead, bent elbows, and slender waist, suggested by the suavity of the curve, have all contributed towards the beauty of the torso which was the object. Not satisfied with the performance, the artist made further attempts to enhance the beauty of the goddess by a lavish display of ornaments and elaborate coiffure. The hair



Figure 1

MOTHER GODDESS—KULLI

is done up in a high pile of plaited curls fastened in front by a fillet leaving a graceful chignon to descend on to the nape of the neck. In two instances, however, plaits have been shown falling over the breasts, but they have not been made to hang loosely and are related to the rounded shoulders, rows of neck-chains, and arms akimbo. The ornaments consist of a necklace, or torque, heavy bangles, and conical ear-rings. The neck-ornament is made up of concentric rows of chains; in the more elaborate samples it hangs below the breasts with pectoral-like objects.

ZHOB GODDESS

Very remarkable are the Zhob plastics of the Mother Goddesses. Like the Kulli figurines they are also small, not more than two inches high. Like them they end below the waist and like them too they are adorned with coif and necklace. But here the comparison ends. The Zhob modellers shaped their Mother Goddess into a less benign and a more fierce deity. If the Kulli goddesses represent life and light, then the Zhob goddesses may be said to symbolize a vision of fear, death, and darkness. Now the vision of death and darkness gives birth to nightmare creatures—witches, goblins, ghouls, and spectres. Therefore the symbol of the Terrible Mother in all primitive cultures, whether in India, Egypt or Rome, are all terrifyingly alike.

In the Zhob figurines the fearful expression is suggested mainly by the 'grinning skull'. One scholar naively argues that 'the expression of a grinning skull...appears to have been due to the loss of the applied pupils and the present fearful expression was, in all probability, far from the original intention of the modeller.'[6] But it may be pointed out that even where the eye-sockets are not skeletal, as in the case of the image reproduced on Figure 2 here, the tiny model



Figure—2
MOTHER GODDESS—ZHOB

is gruesome, and the owl-beak nose, wide-open mouth, broad forehead create a formal pattern which suggests nothing but awe and terror. If the womb of the Earth generates life and if it could be perceived by the image of the Feminine, then its opposite, the mental experience of the negative aspect of life, could also be visualized as Feminine. It is not by accident therefore—by the loss of applied pupils—that the Zhob figurines evoke in our mind a macabre vision of desolation and darkness.

It may not be improbable then that the peasant potters of the Kulli and the Zhob worshipped different forms of female divinities. Considering how little we know of these cultures, it is too early to press the point; but to suppose that these fignres are stray *objects d'art* would be far from the truth. For the cult of the Mother Goddess is found as much in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic ages as in the Bronze age, in Egypt, Crete, and Mesopotamia and its continuity throughout the Mediterranean and the whole of the Ancient East seems to presuppose a unitary *Weltanschauung* which characterizes all primitive cultures. Small wonder, the peasant potters of Baluchistan and Sind should in common with other prehistoric cultures turn out images of the Mother Goddesses. In any case, the cult cannot be explained by Vedic liturgy, still less by Vedic religion. The religion of the conquering Aryans consisted in the apotheosis of male divinities and the worship of the Mother Goddess, the cult of the conquered, *dasyu*, in consequence fell into disuse until revitalized and transformed it forced its way into Hinduism in the Gupta period.[7]

(iii) MOHENJO DARO AND HARAPPA

Though the cultures of the Zhob and the Kulli were related to the Indus Valley civilization, the relationship is

hardly close enough to justify the assumption that the art of the latter springs from the former.[8] Nevertheless, such a statement can have only a provisional validity for the sum of our knowledge about this elusive civilization is far from comprehensive. Thus we cannot even be sure if the inhabitants of the Harappa Culture[9] were indigenous or immigrants. If it is claimed, as Basham does[10] for instance, that they were Indians, then the civilization should have evolved out of an earlier civilization, but no search has so far brought to light the continuity between the Harappan and pre-Harappan, or early Harappan cultures. If, on the other hand, it is maintained that this civilization owed its inception to what Toynbee calls 'the stimulus of new ground' and that the inhabitants arrived by sea with all the 'social apparatus' packed on board ship rather than by land from Sumer or from Elam, then we shall have to consider this civilization as an outlying province of the Sumerian, whereas what is striking about this civilization is its distinctive complexion and atmosphere, its complete self-sufficiency, and its unique individuality. It is undeniable, therefore, that our knowledge of the Indus civilization is vague, if tantalizing. Its origin is lost in the haze of prehistory, the stages of its development are unknown, and its decline is precipitous. The civilization of the Indus Valley poses as much a problem to the professed students of Indian history as to those of Indian art.

When we turn to the Indus Valley art the first thing that strikes us is the extreme paucity of its products. The Indus civilization comprehended a large area, 950 miles from north to south, and included three small towns and many villages in addition to two great cities, Mohenjo Daro on the right bank of the Indus and Harappa on the left bank of the Ravi, with 350 miles intervening between the two. Does it not sound odd that it should have yielded so

few artefacts to the spade of the explorer? It may be that the creative genius which went to the making of the Indus civilization was mainly directed to the realization of *bonum utile*, trade, commerce, and construction of severely utilitarian brick-buildings, rather than to the creation and contemplation of beauty. Or it may just as well be that the Indus civilization was theocratic in character, and the priests and kings no less than the dancer and musician were held back by a puritanical inhibition to give a free expression to their craving for beauty. At any rate, the small number of art finds proves that we cannot agree with the view of Professor Gordon Childe that the civilization which was as old and venerable as the Pyramids was in its art the peer of Ancient Egypt.[11]

The art of the Indus Valley is solely represented by its seals and statuettes. Perhaps neither architecture nor painting had any attraction for the Indus people. A few statuettes in stone, fewer in bronze, some animals and human beings in terracotta, and a handful of glyptic seals or amulets in steatites, these constitute the modest contribution of the Indus civilization to the plastic art of India.

Among sculptures in stone only thirteen pieces have so far come to light. Two of these are attributed to Harappa, the rest to Mohenjo Daro. The eleven sculptures[12] found at Mohenjo Daro represent both animals and male figures; but unluckily not one of them is whole, a few weathered beyond recognition.

STEATITE FIGURINE

By far the most celebrated statuette at Mohenjo Daro is the bust of a bearded man (Figure 3) in steatite (limestone, according to Benjamin Rowland) unearthed 4½ feet below the surface in the DK Area, that is, in the northern part of the



Figure—3

A BEARDED MAN

excavated city. The tip of the nose and nostrils of this figure have now worn away, but the chief features, such as the half-shut eyes, long nose, portruding lips, shaven upper lip, and extremely low forehead, are all unimpaired, thus making it easy for us to follow clearly the style and technique of the representation. It is to be observed that although the statue is a portrait, there are but a few individual traits about it. Individuality is here subordinated to generalization, which is expressed in terms of stylized convention. Thus the beard is obtained by the incised lines, the hair above the band is without volume, and the shell-like ear is in a continuation of the line of the jaw. The arrangement of the robe is also conventional. It is stiffly modelled without any naturalistic folds, which demands little skill and less sensitiveness in the handling of the convention.

A good deal of interest in this sculpture obviously, therefore, lies not in its artistry, but in the clue that it offers to some of the vexed problems of the Indus Valley civilization. Looking at the half-shut eyes and downcast glance directed to the tip of the nose, scholars have thought that the image of the elderly man has been cast in the very act of yoga meditation. A yogi may have often been found meditating in that posture, but should every image shown in that posture necessarily be that of a yogi too? It may just as well be that the bearded figurine is a *homme de robe* or if not, at least, a man of substance; for his carefully trimmed moustache, shaven upper lip, the circular clasp on the forehead and on the right arm, in short, the very type of personality goes ill with the soft abstracted air of a yogi intent on mystical contemplation. As for the eyes half closed in meditation, it should be enough to say that they are those of a man of Mongoloid extraction, though the low forehead has been suggested to have ethnical community with short-headed Armenoid type. This is hardly an enigma, for these

ethnic strains were present in the Indus Valley.

DANCING GIRL

On a very different footing is the bronze figurine of the 'Dancing Girl' (Figure 4) from Mohenjo Daro. For all that it indicates a superiority over the bearded figure, this work of art can hardly be appraised in relation to the past. Free from the rigidity which attends the bearded steatite, this figurine gives the impression that the art of the Indus Valley has suddenly emerged from the archaic but conventional phase of expression towards a final maturity, skilful indeed but hardly endowed with creative significance. The two works of art, therefore, remain unrelated; the line of development that must have existed between the two styles of expression cannot now be traced.

If the bronze figurine thus appears to bear no relation to any previous work of art, it is not, on that score, without any artistic interest. For no one can glance at this figurine without marvelling at its mastery of technical accomplishment, well exemplified, for instance, in the vivid play of curve, counter-curve, angle, and verticle. But in spite of the skill and surehandedness of the technique, the 'Dancing Girl' reflects very little feeling of a refined sensibility, and the encomiums showered on it sound a little over-generous. The point to be made is that, although in a good work of art the distinction between technique and feeling should hardly be felt, technical sophistication often outstrips sophistication of feeling. The 'Dancing Girl' is a fine example of technical virtuosity but the virtuosity is empty, devoid of a deeper feeling. We cannot say of the 'Dancing Girl', as we can of the Sanchi dryad, that the technique and feeling are simultaneous in their development.

At this point we must pause to consider in brief the type



Figure—4
DANCING GIRL

of feminine beauty realized in the figurine. We are apt to go wrong in our estimate of this figurine, if we look at it as an illustration of the luscious and opulent fleshiness of the female body that usually charmed Ancient India. It will be realized that the 'Dancing Girl' is very different from the full-breasted, heavy-thighed, and wasp-waisted female beauty of Ancient India typified in the figure of the Sanchi dryad. There is as little suggestion of flesh in the figurine of the 'Dancing Girl' as in modern athletic girls. The unclad body is willowy, the breasts are light but taut, and thighs and waist slender. The hip is again narrow unlike that of the Sanchi dryad. The build of the nose and lips is also very noteworthy; the former broad and somewhat flat, the latter with a fleshly pout. The beauty thus of the female form represented in the bronze figurine seems to be based on what we know of the Proto-Australoid type which, as Professor Piggott remarks, perhaps constituted the 'under-dogs' of the Harappan social system. But while the bronze figurine represents a particular type of female beauty, we must not think on the evidence of this that 'the canons of female beauty among the Harappa people were very different from those of later India'.[13] In protest we may point out that since in Harappa there were more than one ethnic strain, it is extremely unlikely that the Harappans should have derived their notions of female beauty from the aboriginal Proto-Australoid type alone.

It should be further understood that as an ideal feminine beauty the 'Dancing Girl' differs as much from the Sanchi dryad as from a Greek Aphrodite or a Byzantine Madonna. We cannot say that any one of these ideals is inferior to, or better than, any other. Each of these may inspire a beautiful image, for all the difference in the concepts of female loveliness. It is essential to avoid the common error of confusing natural beauty with aesthetic beauty. If we suppose that the beauty of a thing of art is purely

representational we should be grieviously mistaken. Thus when it is asserted that the 'Dancing Girl' is beautiful or ugly what is meant to be understood is that it has, or is lacking in, aesthetic beauty.

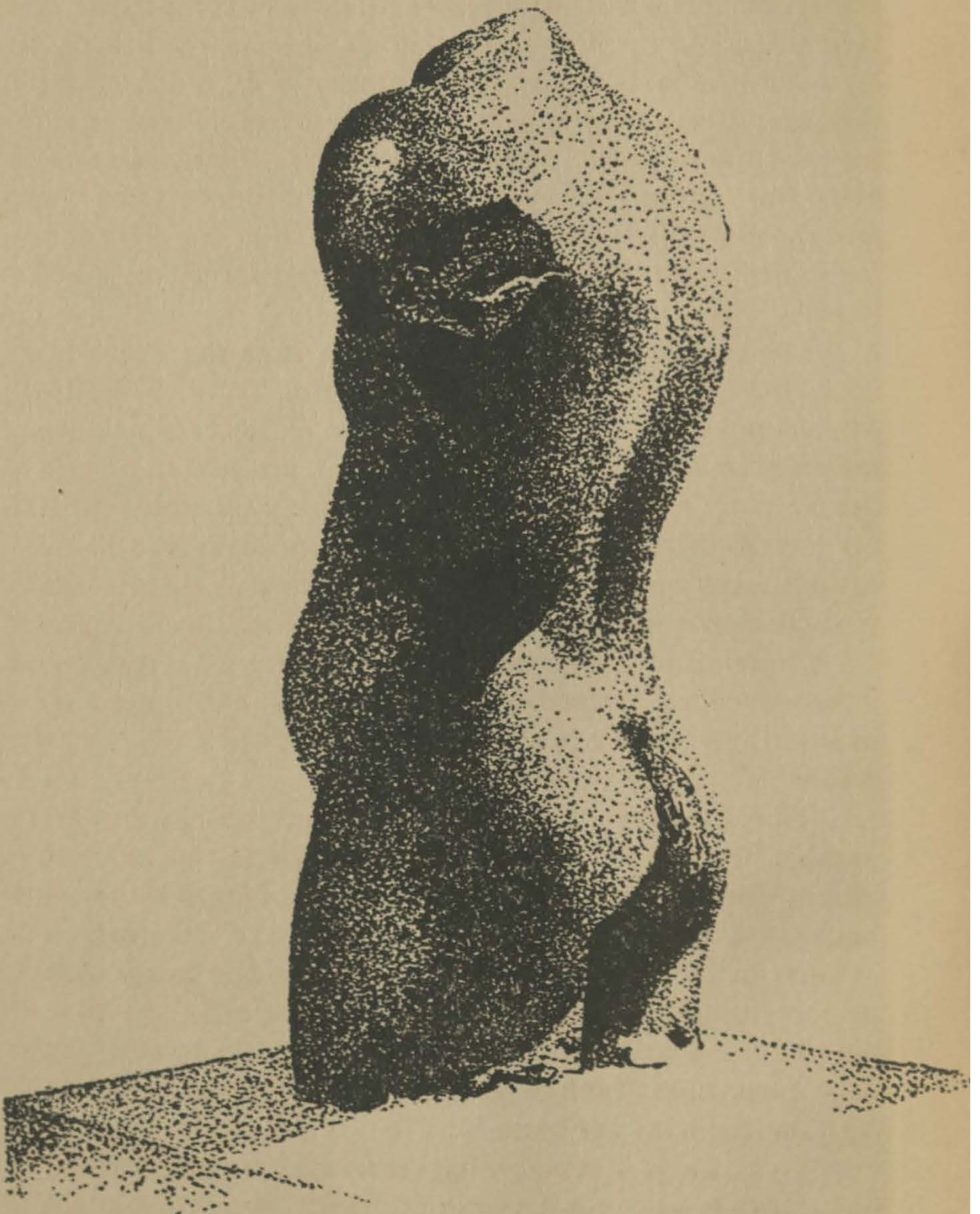
Let us consider now why in our opinion the technique in the bronze figurine is incommensurate with the feeling. It will be granted at once that this figurine is treated with a certain vigour obtained mainly by a subtle interplay of curve and vertical. Thus the straight plane of the right leg is constrasted with the bend of the left leg, and the rigidly curved right arm with the limp left arm. But while all these elements have clearly contributed towards the movement and alertness in the figurine, they have stopped short, as it were, on the side of feeling, the vitality asserting itself in an ostentatious display of defiant audacity. Hence Sir John Marshall's description of the right hand on the right hip of this figurine as 'a half-impudent posture' is convincing. A recent critic of Sir John Marshall, Mulk Raj Anand thinks otherwise. According to him, the description is imprecise 'because the figure is clearly in the middle of the dance'.[14] Two points seem deserving of notice in this criticism. The first is that the argument illustrates the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. We cannot see how the girl can escape the charge of impudence merely because she is in the middle of a dance. Nor do we know clearly if the girl is in the middle of a dance or any stage at all. She may simply be plying the world's oldest trade or may be a Kulli girl in an alien land.[15] The second point deserving notice is that it is not merely the position of the right hand on the right hip that seems to determine the tone of the whole. Indeed, the expression of fatuous impudence is as apparent from the coquettish tilt of the head and from the provocative posture of the torso as from the seat of the spiritual in the human body, the face. It is remarkable how all the elements have been adroitly com-

bined to call for a kind of perverse attention to a somewhat coarse sex appeal, thus disguising an impoverishment of sensibility which is hardly in consonance with the suave refinement of the technique.

A HARAPPAN TORSO

No less problematic are the two headless torsos from Harappa. Both these figurines have been attributed to Harappan Culture by Sir John Marshall, but the fact that these have been found not far from the surface and were under those of the Buddhist period remains make their antiquity doubly dubious. Nor is an appeal to the internal aesthetic evidence more fruitful, and all this may well point to a much later date. Identification of these figures is not likely to light up the dark mystery, for it is extremely difficult to say whom they represent. The first of these, the figure of the adipose man, has been identified with Aan (the Lord or the Supreme God) by Father H. Heras, who is one of those who have tried to read the Mohenjo Daro script but failed. The second of these, that of the dancer, has been described as the dancing Nataraja, but why not just a dancer is not at all clear.

In style and technique the two pieces of statuary tread on each other's heels. In both cases the head and arms, which are now missing, were separately attached to the torsos with metal pegs; the nipples were inlaid in plaster. And in both cases the style is purely Indian. It, therefore, do to describe the better executed of the two—the much-photographed torso of the standing statue (Figure 5). It is indeed curious that so eminent a critic as Hermann Goetz should have described this image as a miniature copy of a classic Greek athlete.[16] It needs no unusual sensitiveness to perceive that if a typical Greek sculpture of an athlete is placed side by side with the



Figure—5

A HARAPPAN TORSO

Harappan torso, the latter would appear as completely un-Hellenic. In Greek sculpture, whether it is by Phidias or by Polyclitus, the articulation of the human body is achieved by the accentuation of the surface at the expense of volume. In the Harappan torso, on the other hand, the solid mass is plane, the surface unbroken, the relief of the sculpture low, and the depth less convincing. The tension of the flesh is not felt in the Harappan torso as in a Greek sculpture, nor therefore the rapid shift of light and shade.

The Harappan torso is an exercise in volume and in so far it is that, it is also an exercise in the art of modelling. The plump body hints at no suggestion of naturalistic anatomy: flesh covers bones, muscles, tendons, and all. In fact, it is as a mass of flesh that the figure was conceived. Flesh here has become form and form is flesh. Therefore what is exhibited in the Harappan torso is only manipulation of volume which is divided into broad units of convexities and held together by a linearism—rigid enough in the anterior surface, but loosened up in the posterior and the coronal planes. The indentations in the clavicle region could hardly be the ostensible *raison d'etre* of the image.

The Harappan torso may now be judged in the light of another view different from that discussed in the last paragraph. Do we feel satisfied that the various parts in this figure are organically and dynamically related with one another by a 'gliding linearism'?[17] In a work of art which is an organic unity the relation of the parts to the whole is not always one of mere reciprocity, of mutual, causal dependence, but that of mutual interaction which endows the parts with the value of the whole.

Now, this is precisely what is lacking in the Harappan torso. If the back and the sides of this figurine are compared with the front, we see how great is the discrepancy between the two, and how completely the description of the figurine

as an organic whole misses the mark. In every line of the back and the sides we feel a flexible and complex curve, but the lines in the anterior region, in contrast, are rigid and monotonous. The same rigidity is also apparent in the manipulation of movement in the front. The appropriateness of the surface modelling in the sides clearly lies in the skilful variation of backward and forward movements, representing the changing tone and tempo of the feeling; in the front, on the other hand, our awareness of the elevated plane of the breast seems to interfere with the still more elevated plane of the distended abdomen. The latter, again, does not harmonize with the downward slope of the conspicuous pelvic cavity. The pelvic cavity, in turn, is ill matched with lifeless thighs, and thus it is that in visualizing the torso as a whole we cannot attend to the parts as parts of the whole to which they are supposed to be related. On the contrary, we do perceive them as parts which are hostile to our awareness of the whole.

From all this it will also be evident that the relationship of the parts in the Harappan torso is not dynamic either. A sculpture is said to be dynamic when it gives the suggestion of movement. The movement may be represented as actual physical movement as in the Tamil bronze of the dancing Siva; it may be solely formed out of the inner tension as in the seated Buddha icon of the Gupta age. The Master sits statically enough, yet from each part of the body radiates a dynamic energy. In the Harappan torso flesh is not irradiated by a dynamic vitality. But should it be pointed out that the back and the sides of the figure exhibit movement and hence dynamism, it might then be stated that this dynamism is carnal. The very burliness of the figure robs it of all sensitiveness to movement and dynamism.

The Harappan torso is coarse in tone and heavy in

touch. It is not at all sur rising, therefore, that Rowland should call our attention to the Parkham Yaksha, an alleged Mauryan sculpture, for a comparison with it.[18] But Parkham Yaksha is much less of a ruin and is ornamented with torques, waist-band, and ear-ornaments besides being draped in waist-cloth. Therefore it would be more profitable to take up the torso of the so-called Jain Tirthankara from Lohanipur of the same period, a piece like the Harappan torso without a head, arms and legs. Both are nudes and both heavy and fleshy. Both, again, bear the stamp of a common style. But, curiously enough, the much later Lohanipur torso is cruder in execution than the much earlier Harappan specimen. The treatment of the modelling here is stiff and flat in all sides, the draughtsmanship hesitating, and the coordination between the surface and the rounded forms less advanced than in the Harappan torso, proving thus the unsoundness of the statement that the Harappan torso looks forward to the style of later Indian sculpture.[19]

THE INDUS SEALS

We now turn to the glyphic art of the stamp-seals. An analysis of these will indicate that they, too, like the statutuettes analysed already, do not contribute much to our understanding of the evolution of Harappan art. They should, therefore, be treated as something *sui generis*.

What purpose these seals served to the Harappans we hardly know, but in Egypt, as in Ancient Middle East, these seals were widely used to identify and legalize letters, documents, and to assure the safe keeping of the valuables. Often by means of these seals business was transacted on behalf of the master by his representative. Thus in the parable of the Prodigal Son when the father put a ring on his son's finger he meant that his son could do business

on his behalf. In *Mudrarakshasa*, a Sanskrit play by Vishakhadatta, Chanakya employs a spy to obtain the signet ring of Rakshasa in his machinations against the latter. If the Harappans made such uses of seals, it follows that their use was limited only to the *elite* of society even though some seals are said to have been discovered in the dwellings of the plebs.

The Harappan seals were sawn out of steatite, coated with alkali, and baked in fire which lent a glaze to the view. They are usually square or oblong, each between $\frac{3}{4}$ in. to $1\frac{1}{4}$ ins. in length, and with a perforated boss at the back, a device which paid a double purpose: for suspension and for pressing on any substance. Not all seals have, however, holes for suspension; nor are all of them square. A few round and cylindrical seals have also been unearthed from the different find-spots and from different levels. The presence of cylinder-seals in the Indus Valley prove sthat the Harappans must have had association with the peoples of Sumer and Assyria, for cylinder-seal, of ultimate Sumeric origin, prevailed in the Middle East, and nowhere else, from the fourth millennium B. C. to the Hellenistic period.

On these soft steatite seals the Harappans engraved designs in intaglio besides inscriptions on pictographic scripts. Some seals are without designs and bear an inscription only. The seals vary in theme and in artistic merit. By far the greater number of designs in these seals are those of animals. A large seal, depicting the so-called Proto-Siva reproduces, among other things two figures of deer. A broken seal from Harappa shows a swift-footed hare; another, also from Harappa, a splayed eagle. Among mammals are to be found representations of rampant lions and rhinoceroses and among reptiles fish-eating crocodiles or gharials. The image of a roaring tiger retreating from the foot of a tree is depicted in many seals. The representation of elephant,

the staple subject of Indian animal-art, is also not wanting among these seals. Other carvings of animals include the water buffalo and goats but no horses. Curiously enough, the divine cow is non-existent. Perhaps the place of honour was given to the great urus bull, of which there are many artistic delineations, and of which one sample is reproduced on page 31. The images of mythological animals, such as *yali* (monsters), *makara* (sea-monsters), lion-griffins, and hyppogriphs, which decorate the shrines in India, especially in the South, did also catch the fancy of the Harappans as is evident, for instance, from the image of a tiger with two horns.

THE CONCEPT OF PROTO-SIVA

Amongst the seals there are many representations of human figures, of which nine, whose identification seems most controversial, claim our attention. These nine may be conveniently grouped under three headings. These three are: (a) Proto-Siva; (b) Horned Deity; and (c) A Hero Fighting with a Tiger (Lion). It will be our endeavour to show first, that the representation of human figure in different postures in the seals of each of the three groups refers to one and the same person and not to three distinctly different individuals as is commonly believed; and second, the similarity between the icon of Proto-Siva and that of Siva of post-Vedic Hinduism is adventitious, and consequently on this ground alone we cannot infer the subsistence of the concept of Proto-Siva in the Indus Valley civilization.

The so-called Proto-Siva may be first described. Three seals from Mohenjo Daro—one reproduced by Marshall[20] and two others by Mackay[21]—depict this god seated with legs crossed and hands outstreched resting on knees. Two of these figures sit on a neither over-high nor over-low pedestal and the other on the ground. Since Sir John Marshall's identi-



Figure—6

PROTO-SIVA SEAL



Figure—7

A HERO FIGHTING A TIGER

fication of these figures, they have been taken unquestioningly as the prototype of the great god Siva; before the excavations of the Indus Valley sites, and hence before Marshall's analysis of these seals, the Vedic god Rudra was commonly thought to be Proto-Siva. It may now be asked on what grounds these figures are called Proto-Siva. They are: First, the great Hindu god Siva is often called Pasupati (Lord of Animals), and in one of the three seals—the largest of the three—the figure has been depicted surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, a buffalo, and a pair of antelope. Secondly, Siva has often been conceived as three-faced (*trimukha*); in two seals the figure appears to be three-faced. Thirdly, as is well known, in Hindu mythology Siva has been often assigned the role of a patron deity of ascetics (*mahayogi*) sitting cross-legged in profound meditation. In all the three seals the figure is seen sitting in what is known as the *kurmasana* pose in the manuals of yoga exercise, that is 'with legs bent double beneath him, heel to heel, and toes turned downwards'. Finally, in each of the three seals the figure wears two horns and a head-dress which looks like small branching twigs. The association of horn with Siva is not uncommon. In the *Mahabharata* there is a reference to it.[22] As a musical instrument it is placed in one of the hands of Siva. It is of interest to observe also that a Bengali poet Bharatchandra Ray, as late as eighteenth century, refers to the blowing of horns in describing Siva in his terrific (*ugra* or *ghora*) aspect.

Now the only two elements that are common to all three are the sitting posture and the horns, and of these two the first seems to have more influenced our attempt to identify these figures with the prototype of great god Siva, for had the figures not been represented in that posture our identification may have been less sure. Thus the scholars are less certain about the identity of the figure in a seal

from Mohenjo Daro, grouped under the heading of 'Horned Deity', where the figure is shown standing flanked by branches of a tree, possibly *ficus religiosa* (Figure 8). Granting that the figure is that of a male, it may be observed that it is unmistakably that of Proto-Siva. Like the Proto-Siva this figure also has two horns, a necklace, and is *in puris naturalibus.* A kneeling man, his hands folded in supplication, is seen doing obeisance to him. Behind him is a large goat, and along the bottom a group of seven pigtailed figures. The same scene is repeated in another seal from Mohenjo Daro,[23] while a fragmentary seal from Harappa contains part of it.[24] There seems to be no reason why these standing figures may not be identified with the figures depicted in the Proto-Siva seals.

With the standing figure, just now mentioned, are to be associated somewhat different, but closely related, figures represented in the seals of the third group, that is, 'A Hero Fighting with a Tiger (Lion)'. Thus in one seal[25], here reproduced on figure 7, a horned man is figured as fighting a horned tiger. Another seal[26] depicts a human figure, without horns but with knobbed hair, fighting two rearing tigers, while yet another[27] shows a horned archer, his body draped in foliage. These two could be identified with the figures of Proto-Siva. They all have two horns.

And since these figures closely resemble Sumerian Gilgamesh or his friend Enkidu (Eabani) it would be just as plausible to describe Gilgamesh and Enkidu as Proto-Siva. It appears, therefore, that the concept of Proto-Siva appears to be no more than the concept of Sumerian hunter-hero, and if so, have we done more than take a turn round Robin Hood's barn? But when we talk of Proto-Siva we have in mind something indigenous, and not simply a hunter-hero who held the primitive Sumerian society in fee. In these seals where is that characteristic Indian element?

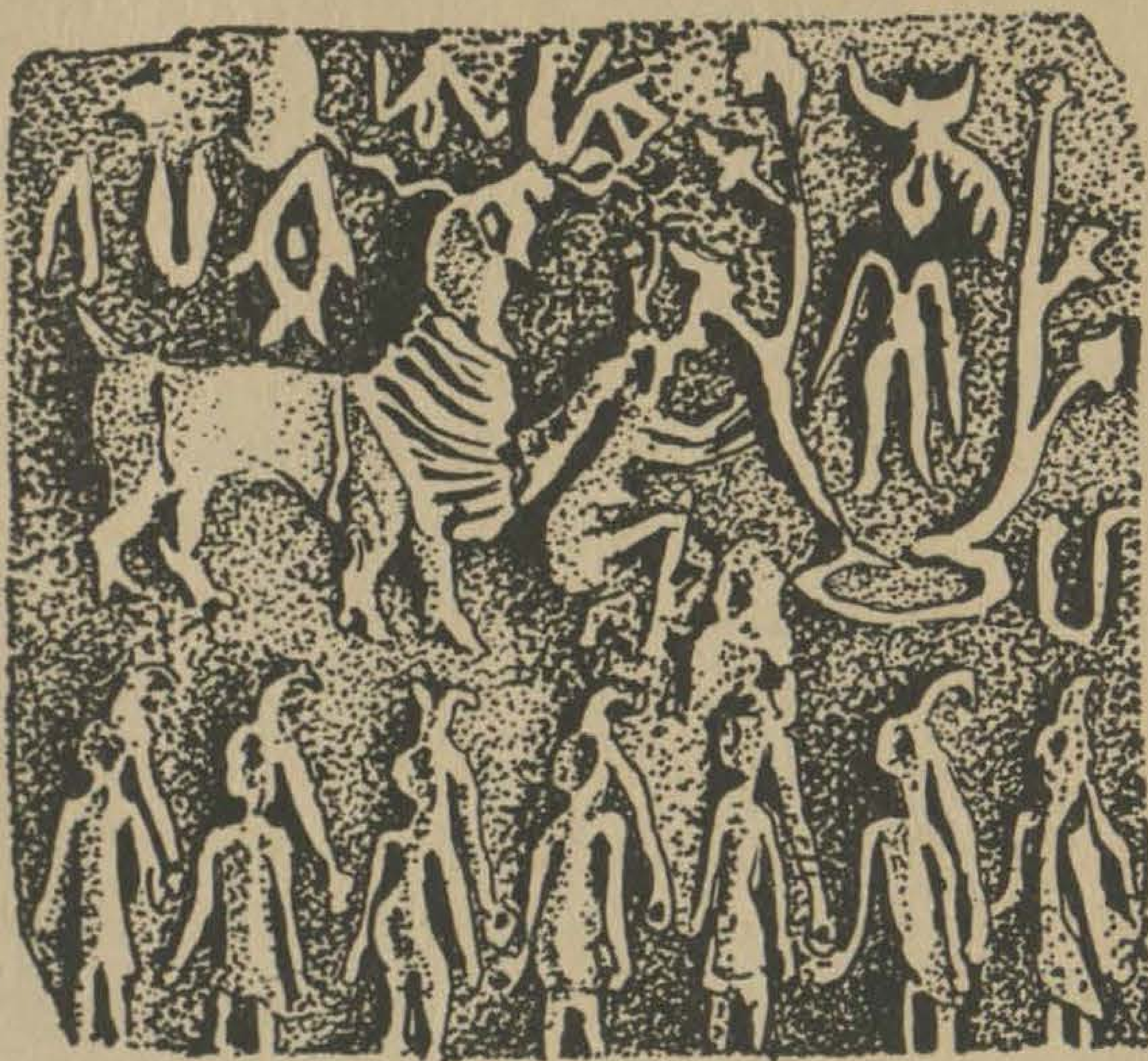
We may argue that of the four features illustrative of Proto-Siva, three are frankly non-Indian, and cannot, therefore, be claimed to be the attributes of an Indian god. However, the concept of a deity surrounded by animals is not Indian. The monuments in Minoan Crete furnish us with representations of gods and goddesses surrounded by animals. If the Harappan Proto-Siva is Pasupati, why not these? Then secondly, the concept of a three-faced god is present in such triads as those of Sin, Shamesh, and Ishtar or of Anu, Enlil, and Ea—all Babylonian and Sumerian deities and hence antecedent to the Harappans. As for the horns, it scarcely needs to be pointed out that instances of gods, priests, and kings wearing horned head-dress are plentiful in the land of twin rivers. Yet if it should be asserted that the cross-legged figure is that of Proto-Siva—not very easy in the face of these facts—then the only plank left would be the yoga posture. What warrants us, one wonders, in attributing the yoga posture to these figures. For a hunter-hero what could be more natural, east of Suez, than sitting in a cross-legged posture surrounded by animals? Moreover, yoga meditation in a cross-legged posture is only a praxis, and though characteristic of the genius of Indian soil where gods are depicted in that posture, is not a *sine qua non* of Siva, or for that matter any of the *di majorum gentium* in Hinduism. Nor must we forget that Indologists have far from established the prevalence of yoga exercise among the Harappans. After all, why should not the Proto-Siva be just a hunter?

HARAPPAN LEGACY

These seals, particularly those with carved bull-figures, are more *mouvemente* and exhibit more technical skill than the few statuettes which are of the Harappan bequest. It

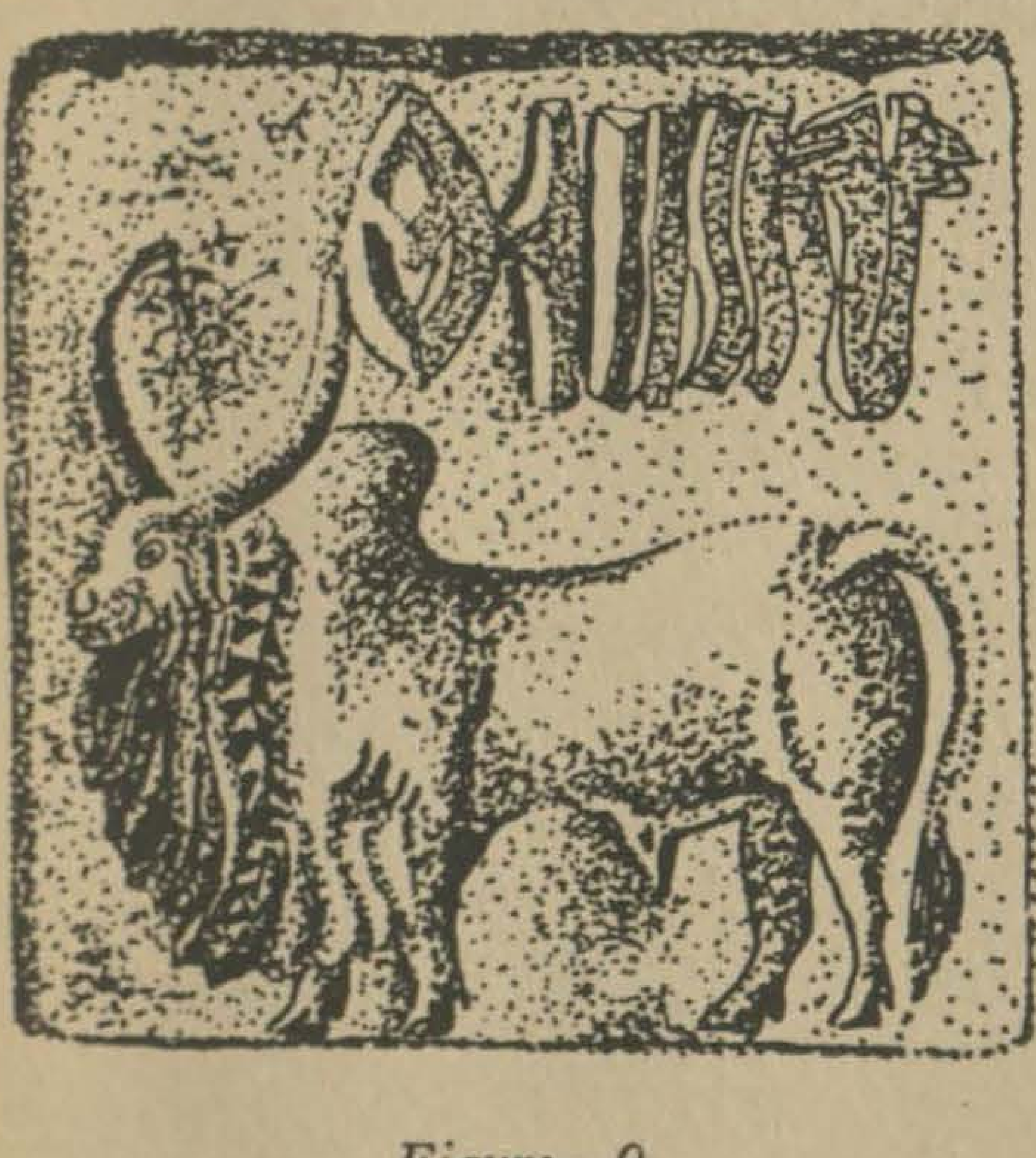
will be clear even to a lay observer that the artist has not chosen the objective method of representation as it obtains in Occidental art. There is here no attempt at attaining verisimilitude by correlating the technical proportion with objective proportions. Thus in the seal entitled 'Horned Deity', a copy of which appears as Figure 8, what strikes us is that the movements of the different objects do not affect either the proportions or the positions of the figures. The seven pigtailed persons placed below both the standing figure and the half-kneeling persons are not brought into any relation with the group above. The goat, again, is disproportionately larger than the dimensions of the rest of the figures. We notice, too, that in the Harappan animal-seals the head and limbs are shown, in profile, while the horns and eyes are rendered in front view. And finally, we find that the definition of details in these seals is lineal.

Now, these three characteristics reflect also the *Kunstwollen* (artistic intention) of the Harappan artist. He, we are inclind to think, had his eyes fixed on what Aristotle had called 'potential'. With Aristotelian 'actual', which enables the artist to capture the vital and organic being, the Harappan artist was hardly concerned. However imperfectly we may be constrained to understand Harappan art, we shall not go far wrong if we claim that the Harappan artist realized his aim chiefly by means of these three characteristics, and it is these three characteristics which are also the three legacies that the Harappans have handed down to us.



Figure—8

HORNED DEITY



Figure—9

BOS INDICUS

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The classification of pottery-bearing cultures into two groups, red-ware and buff-ware, was first proposed by McCown who made use of it in his study of prehistoric Iran. See his *The Comparative Stratigraphy of Early Iran* (Oriental Institute of Chicago, 1942). Following McCown, Stuart Piggott has observed a similar distinction in Baluchistan. Consult Piggott's *Prehistoric India* (Penguin edition, 1950). The classification, like all other scientific classifications, is provisional. Sir Mortimer Wheeler refers to a red-ware identified by Miss B. de Cardi near Quetta which is south of the red-ware area. The supplementary volume of *The Cambridge History of India* by Sir Mortimer Wheeler may be consulted.
2. It may be pointed out that in Vedic India the bull did not lose its sanctity. Indra, the great god of *Rigveda*, is often conceived as a bull. In the *Atharvaveda* the bull has been called Indra. 'Men call thee Indra' thus runs the verse in IX.4.9. This and similar citations only prove that Vedic gods were often conceived theriomorphically. The worship of Vedic gods did not require the use of images.
3. Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, p. 117.
4. Nirad C. Chaudhuri thinks that the Aryans 'had not found their humped cattle' in India, and argues that 'it was and remains an Aryan heirloom'. See *The Continent of Circe*, p. 172.
5. Curiously enough, this point has not received the attention of the *Kunsthistoriker* beyond the following remark: 'They all terminate at the waist in a slightly splayed, flat-bottomed pedestal....' See S. K. Saraswati, *A Survey of Indian Sculpture* (Calcutta, 1957). The present quotation is from Stuart Piggott's *Prehistoric India*, p. 107.

6. S. K. Saraswati, *A Survey of Indian Sculpture*, p. 6.
7. Also in Buddhism. The goddess Tara seems to be a refined version of the crude figurines of Mother Goddesses.
8. The following extracts from Stuart Piggott's 'The Chronology of Prehistoric North-West India,' *Ancient India*, I (1946), pp. 15-16 may be cited in support:

   'Curiously enough, save for the use of deep red slip, the pottery of the Harappa culture has no analogues in the Zhob material, such materials as there are belong to motifs lying to the south rather than to the north.'

   'Most interesting are the connexions between the Harappa and the Kulli cultures. Certain common pottery motifs occur in both cultures... .'

   'Further correlations between Kulli and Harappa are seen in the clay figurines of women...the style of hair-dressing of many figurines of the Kulli culture is exactly comparable with that of the famous Dancing Girl bronze from Mohenjo Daro.... The cumulative effect of these parallels of the Harappa culture with that of the Kulli is impressive; at least it must mean that the Harappa folk had mercantile relations with the Kulli people to a degree unshared by any other of the provincial cultures....'
9. Unless the context otherwise requires, in this essay the phrase 'Harappa Culture' refers not only to the type-site but also to those places where the remains of the Indus Valley civilization have been discovered. Likewise the adjective 'Harappan' signifies that which pertains to the Indus Valley civilization.
10. A. L. Bhasham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 15.
11. Gordon Childe, 'The Structure of the Past', *The Geographical Magazine*, XVI (1943), p. 168.

12. See Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *The Indus Civilization (The Cambridge History of India*: Supplementary Volume) pp. 64-65, for a description of these eleven sculptures.
13. A. L. Bhasham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 21.
14. Mulk Raj Anand writing on Indian sculpture in the *Marg*, XVI (1962), p. 4.
15. See Stuart Piggott's *Prehistoric India*, p. 115.
16. Hermann Goetz, *Five Thousand Years of Indian Art*, p. 29.
17. I have in mind S. K. Saraswati's analysis given in his *A Survey of Indian Sculpture.*
18. Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 44.
19. A. L. Bhasham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 20.
20. Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley Civilization*, I, 53, pl. XII, 17.
21. E. J. H. Mackay, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, I, 335; II, pls. LXXXVII, 222, 235 and XCIV, 420.
22. See *Vanaparva*, 88, 8.
23. Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley Civilization*, III, pl. CXVIII, 7.
24. M. S. Vats, *Excavations at Harappa*, II, pl. XCIII, 316.
25. Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley Civilization*, I, 57; II, pls. CXI, 357.
26. E. J. H. Mackey, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, I, 337; pls. LXXXIV, 75, 86, LXXXV, 122 and XCV, 454.
27. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Vedic Age*, pl. VII, 7.

ART AND LETTERS SERIES

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BOOKS THAT MATTER

JOHN MALCOLM: THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF INDIA
Edited by K.N. Panikkar

During the formative period of the British Indian Empire, John Malcolm, son of a Scots border farmer, served the East India Company in India for about forty-five years. Starting his official career as an ensign at the age of fourteen in 1783, "Boy Malcolm" retired as the Governor of Bombay in 1830.

Barring three short spells of furlough in England, Malcolm was in the thick of action, scuttling between the blood-soaked battle-fields of the Deccan and Hindustan and the glittering native courts of Gwalior and Mysore. He was associated with every major war and with every major diplomatic transaction during the period he was in India. His prime concern, except in the last two years, was the "task of conquest" either by war or by diplomacy. There was no other soldier, political or administrative, including his illustrious contemporaries—Thomas Munro, Mountstuart, Elphinstone, and Charles Metcalfe—who knew about Indian politics and diplomacy as intimately as Malcolm did because nobody else was exclusively in the diplomatic line for such a long time as Malcolm was. Naturally, Malcolm "had much to say" about Indian politics and British policy towards Indian States. *The Political History of India*, published in 1813, is a striking example of Malcolm's profound understanding of Indian history. The contribution of the British administrator-historians to the Indian historical writing is both qualitative and quantitative. Most of them, however, were concerned with general accounts, writing primarily for educating the younger officials and, at times, for the benefit of the general public. But a few like Malcolm have made studies in depth of a chosen period of British rule in India or enquired into the history of a particular region of the country. Their participation either in the process of conquest, consolidation and preservation of the Empire or their intimate knowledge of the region concerned give to their narratives a sense of intimacy as well as authenticity. Malcolm's writings, *The Political History of India*, *The Memoirs of Central India*, *The History of Persia*, etc., belong to this class. Contemporaneity imparts to them the quality of source material. Malcolm was one of the first to make use of the official records of the East India Company in writing the history of India under the Company's rule. "It is almost a miracle", remarks John William Kaye, biographer of Malcolm, "that considering in how large sense he was a man of action, how the necessities of the public service kept him continually in motion, and how his mind was diverted and distracted by a constant succession of new objects, he wrote as much as he did". Indeed it is also a miracle that Malcolm who had no schooling worth the name, and "who since the age of thirteen had seldom any other home than a canvas tent, and whose library was a rusty bullock-trunk" wrote as well as he did.